Anger Is Not the Problem. The Blowup Is – with Paul Gutrecht Transcript

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Introduction to Hotness and Paul Gutrecht

Welcome to Hotness, the podcast that brings you practical tools to balance your hormones and rekindle connection, confidence, and desire in midlife and beyond.

I'm your host, Dr. Liz Lister. Hotners is a safe space for honest conversations about menopause, sex, identity, love, loss, reinvention, and desire, because you can embrace your hotness at every age.

Hello, my hot ones. You are in for a treat with this interview today with Paul Guttrecht. you've got to listen to it all the way through to the end. There's some real pearls towards the and as well.

Paul is a licensed marriage and family therapist in the West Los Angeles area, Southern California. He has over a decade of experience specializing in anger, And anger behavior management, we'll talk about that distinction.

He has counseled all kinds of people, CEOs, executives, attorneys, high power professionals. he also is referred people to work with who are going through divorce, going to mediation.

So he has a bit of a specialty on the area of anger management. And that's why I wanted to have this conversation with him. He's accredited to provide continuing education credits to therapists and attorneys.

He serves on the Maple Counseling Center's Board of Directors. And he also on a volunteer basis is a clinical supervisor for trainees who are working to achieve their therapist license.

I am very excited to share this conversation with you. So please enjoy my discussion with Paul Gutrecht. Paul Goodrich, welcome to Hotness. Thank you, Liz.

I'm really glad to be here. Delighted to have this conversation with you. And so I want to start out by asking you, what are some skills that you teach men about anger?

And then we'll go from there, right?

Understanding Anger as a Signal

I know you have something to say about the phrase anger management, so let me let you jump off from that. Absolutely. So it is mostly men that I work with either individually or in couples.

I do have some women who reach out so there are some woman that i work as well and obviously in a lot of couples and so really the first thing I want to do is raise awareness and I wanna raise an awareness around the emotion of anger that that's okay to have.

The emotion is a signal. It gives us energy to make change. The challenge is that sometimes the action urge, in some cases a lot of times, becomes something that's not so constructive and more destructive.

So I like to say this should really be about angry behavior management. They never caught on, it's too many syllables, I guess, so we're stuck with anger management, but that kind of gives a bad rap to the emotion.

One of the first things I do is raise awareness that it is okay to have the motion of anger. It's signaling you that something's up, maybe something is wrong, and you want to make some change.

Then the next step is how you're gonna do that, what's gonna be most effective. Yes, I totally get that. What are some tools that you teach men specifically to use in the moment?

The feeling, the emotion of anger, what can they do right in a moment. Obviously, this will apply to women also, but I would like to know specifically with men.

Yeah, and I confess that I'm not so sure how I adjust this differently for men and women. I think it's fairly universal, But we'll see. One of the first things is when we react, we usually want to say something.

Now when we speak, we are inhaling in order to exhale with language. So the first thing I ask everybody to do is just exhale, just breathe out without that thing you're gonna say, okay?

So that's the very first things. Our breath, it's ancient exercise, its ancient skill work to just come back to our core and it really grounds us. That's very the thing.

You're going to take that first breath and then you're gonna take maybe two or three more before you say anything. And during that time, what you are going focus on is, What is my goal here?

Because what happens a lot of the time is that if I get hurt or angry in an exchange, The goal that I had in this conversation to talk about weekend plans, child rearing, finances, goes out the window.

Now that i'm hurt, my new goal is hurt back. And that's a hijack. I call that emotional hijacking and we want to avoid it. So the way we can avoid is by taking a few breaths to remember what is my goal here.

That's really one of the first things. Yes, I've done that in difficult conversations that I have had, not just with men or with partners, but in any situation where it might be challenging, is I'll take a little note on my phone, the notes app, and just like with the topic or a post-it note, just to keep that right in front of me, also so that i remember to say what I wanted to So does that go along with that?

If I have something difficult to say, sometimes I'll even, if I'm really being disciplined, I will start with, that way I don't stall and kind of dance around it.

Is that helpful? I think it can be. The challenge is when I am staking out territory, when i'm saying what I need to and understanding that it's difficult, just want to have my awareness of that.

there may be some reaction from the other person. So one thing that I joke in my anger management group is I say, after all these sessions, if you decide not to change any of your behavior, you're at least going to be aware that your behaviour has consequences, more consequences than you thought.

Breathing and Goal-Setting in Conflict

So it can be very helpful to be direct and hopefully with the other person raising their awareness around their possible reactivity and working on how they communicate, they're going to able to respond to that direct message.

And do you have the opportunity and do your goal of assuming you go underneath? Because there's a lot of emotions that can underneath anger. Can you say a little bit about that?

You know, I do think anger is a primary emotion, if not a primal emotion. But there's a lot of talk in literature out there around anger being a secondary emotion covering sadness or shame.

Okay. So those two things are hard to share. Sadness, shame, what about fear? Absolutely. Fear as well. Yeah. Hurt, loss of power. I'm gonna go back then.

So this is a little go-back of… Sure, they are. The secondary emotion of anger then can cover sadness, shame, or fear. Sure. Yeah, absolutely. We just know there's a lot to being human, right?

It's hard being a human. Absolutely. And we find those things so vulnerable that we try to defend against feeling those thing or revealing those. Because there is a a in the culture about I need to be together, I to look strong and

so forth.

I'm so glad you brought that up. To say a little more about that, what you think is happening, do you that emotional regulation is taught less to boys?

Or maybe it's that girls are culturally trained to just stay quiet? That's interesting territory. Talk about in that area. Speaking anecdotally, I do think in the culture, there's less training for boys around expression of emotion and more training to hold it in and look a certain way and be a certainly.

And I think there is more cultural messaging for women to have less expression. Of those things. I think that we experience that. And so the question is, how we work on our communication, How we bring things out into the relationship that's in between us.

That's not just inside me or inside the other person, but in-between us that were working on together. I am extremely obsessed and fascinated with masculine feminine, especially masculine, feminine energies.

Obviously women and men both have both masculine and feminine energy. And that comes into play when there's like a DNA level. And I don't like being completely heteronormative in my conversations, but I'm talking a lot about male, female, men and women, couples, whether it's a work relationship or an intimate relationship, there's some degree of DNA, I think, programming going on there.

So we can talk about that another time. But I that makes it difficult with the expectations, right? The woman, she could feel frightened. if a man is expressing his anger?

What is a way that that can be framed in a conversation or in setting that would help? And by the way, I want to mention I've worked with same-sex couples.

So these dynamics that we're putting these trans masculine and feminine on, they present themselves in same sex couples as well. I think this is all applicable.

If one person is experiencing fear, now we are going to come down to communication. First of all, it's important for everybody to feel safe in the communication, So it can be hard to let the other person know that you're feeling scared right now.

Okay. I'm feeling, scared. Right now is a perfectly valid thing to say. And in my training in dialectical behavior therapy, all of our emotions are valid.

It's just that our perceptions vary. So the perceptions can to be debatable, but. The emotion that we're having is the emotion we are having in real time.

Naming Fear and Using Whole Expression

So what can be challenging is if someone says, I'm feeling scared right now, that the other person may dismiss it, minimize it or express contempt for that emotion.

It's a challenge. What I want to talk about real quick is a tool that comes from an amazing book that I learned about over a decade ago, it's called messages.

Okay, all I have to do is remember messages- We'll put it in the show notes. Great. Messages by McKay et al. There's a couple other authors. So we usually get lost in our opinions and perspectives.

And so we don't talk about how we're feeling and we do not talk what we need. These are two important elements of a whole expression, a expression having four.

What are the facts? What our positions, values, expectations, memories, anything cognitive? how I'm feeling

emotionally or physiologically, like I am scared and what I need.

Or I was sweaty or my heart is racing or like a description of the body. All of that. And so what i would say if someone's feeling scared in an exchange is to say as non-judgmentally as possible, as factually as possibly.

When you raise your voice, it scares me. OK, let's do the four again with this example. So number one is the fact and trying to describe it as calmly as one as able to in the moment after they've taken their deep breaths.

Right. After the deep breathes, we want to think about the tool of whole expression from this book, messages, which is a whole. One is the fact when you speak more loudly, it makes me or I say it again.

Right. So you say I'm going to. OK, so here are the four facts, perceptions, feelings and wants and needs. I don't have to say them in these orders. I may not even use them all.

If I can lead out opinions, all the better. But I am going start factually as much as possible. When you raise your voice, when you speak more loudly, notice I didn't say when, you yell because a lot of people have different opinions about I'm not yelling.

So it can when. You speak. More loudly. It scares me. I. Am scared now. That's my emotion. Right. OK. No, I don't think I am safe. And I said, think, safe, You can also say feel safe right?

I need to ask you to take a breath and lower your. Voice. Now, I may say, what do you need right now? Right? Now sometimes what's needed is to take a break.

We need to a take break and all the clinicians out there that talk about taking breaks tell you it's vital to say how long you'll need for that break so that the other person doesn't feel abandoned or dismissed.

Yes. So those are important things. Yeah, that's wonderful. I do that with my adult son. When things are just escalating in me, I just say, just I need you to walk away.

If he's come to where I'm sitting, like if I am at my desk and I needed to stay at the desk, so I I not the one that can walkaway, but I'd need separation.

And he does. He does. We've got that figured out. And then we come back and then I make sure that we'd come like, okay, thank you for walking away earlier.

I am in a mental place where we can finish the conversation. Yeah. Now I want to jump in right here to mention something from John and Julie Gottman's research on couples where they…

They're the most famous couples therapy researchers that I think exist, right? Absolutely. And so they would have couples for four hours at a time strapped in with heart rate monitors and pulse monitors, blood pressure monitors.

What they wouldn't notice is that because they ask people to talk about a conflict and then take a break and bring themselves back out of the break when they're ready.

and they noticed because they were observing all the data in real time, most people came back to the conversation before their body was back down at baseline.

So they we're still vulnerable to heating up again. It's really important to take that break and to self-soothe and take care of yourself during that.

Let's talk more about skills. You brought up that tool, which is an awesome tool. How about some other healthy conflict skills? How can people recognize that moment where they, I'm gonna say, lose emotional regulation, that's fair to say.

And like a practical tool to call the pause. To call the pause. Yeah, to call a break. Any other tools that you use with the people you work with? Sure.

Honestly, I keep coming back to this whole expression tool and what I emphasize now is it is a tool. We don't need a whole Expression all the time and we go to the mechanic.

They don' need to know how we're feeling. But in this moment, what we're doing by adding in how I'm feeling and what I need is we are adding more context to the conversation and to circumstances, right?

And I can, if appropriate, in terms of my perspective, I could speak to vision of the relationship. But now we in a heated moment. So what you need to do is Take a breath, acknowledge what's going on right now.

All right, I'm heating up. I am feeling overwhelmed. And then I need to take a break. Now, we want to be real about the time we need. We may need more time at the end of it and we may have to ask for it.

So part of working on the communication between two people is at a time when there is no conflict, trying to set up some ground rules along the lines of like two ethical boxers.

If somebody asks for a break, it's like bell ringing, you drop your gloves and you go to your quarters.

Taking Breaks and Distress Tolerance Skills

You don't add that one last extra jab. And by the way, this brings us to expectation. Two people are engaged, one person's asking for a break, the other person probably doesn't need or want a brake at that moment, so they're gonna be a little frustrated.

They're going to have that emotion of frustration in that movement, and that's real. So they can take a breath and acknowledge that. they might say, okay, we're taking a brach, I'm frustrated and I want to get back to it, but let's take our break.

Okay, no comment about the discussion or about other persons. I wish we didn't need a break right now, but okay. I get that. I think that's a function of love between the people having the discussion, having a conversation where they're trying to clear something up.

Because again, it's commitment to clearing it up and that the bigger picture is caring about the other person. 100%. When people are feeling safe, that's when things are heating up.

We're trying to get back to safety and care. Caring language matters. You need to mean it when you say it. Babe, I need take a pause right now. Honey, this is feeling overwhelmed right know.

That language matter and is meaningful. And it is part of that bigger context. What is my goal here? My goal is for us to enjoy that vacation or enjoy our retirement or whatever conversation we're actually having, right?

That's what we wanna do together. That the bigger goal. And so then the more immediate feelings of anger and frustration, we want to try to understand them in the context of the big goal, that's why that tool of like, what is goal goal?

What are my bigger picture? Now, you mentioned wanting more tools, so I want to name a couple of tools for distress tolerance. This is also from DBT, dialectical behavior therapy.

OK. You said stress tolerance? Distress tolerance, yes. Distressed tolerance OK, interesting. I use the phrase stress-tolerance because when people have their hormones balanced, they have much better stress tolerances.

So maybe I'm going to add this phrase in, say a little more about distress tolerance. Absolutely. So Dr. Marshall Linehan, when she created DBT, one of the things that she added in to the many awesome skills that he's provided

in DB T are some things to that.

She refers to as the tip skills. That's an acronym T I P P. so when you ask for that break because you're heating up or you feeling overwhelmed or not safe, you going to go away and As the gov'ns say, you want to self-soothe during that break.

So DBT says you're going to want tolerate distress. How am I going do that? So the T stands for body temperature. You're literally going cool off. you may not be able to run your face under cold water, but you could get a cool washcloth.

Or you might. Yeah, like that. Absolutely. The opening shot of Shrinking is that character, I'm blanking on his name now, with his face under a faucet in the staff kitchen.

Yeah. Okay. Was that Rick Moranis? Was it a Rick Maraniss movie? Is that? No, no, No. Shrieking is his new series. Oh, a new TV show. Got it. I can't believe I blanked out the guy's name, so I am sorry.

It's okay. Great actor. Blank. Right. So you want to lower your body temperature. You want a cool off with a washcloth on your face or on the back of your neck.

All right. And we're a lot of people that say, hey, I spent a long time on my makeup. I do not want, you know, wash my face for my day. No problem. Grab a cold drink and just while it's closed, put it on the back of your neck at the base of you skull.

Makes a huge difference. Okay? So reference citrus in the freezer and then you can enjoy the scent while you're also bringing it to your base to cool off or just holding it in your hands.

So literal cooling off. That's the first one. The I stands for intense physical exercise and her research was not ongoing. I need a 30 minute workout now because I'm mad.

It is 10 seconds. Go to another room, get your stuff in another space and do 10 jumping jacks. Jog in place for 10 second. You're going to discharge actual energy because our emotions generate action urges.

Anger generates some pretty big action urges. So there's energy created. And part of what we want to do is burn off a little bit of it that may not be the most effective thing in the moment.

Intense physical exercise just for 10 seconds. Maybe I'll need a bit more, but you're not worrying about needing half an hour to go workout. Then the two P's, the first P we already talked about, paced breathing.

We just talked breath work, but in this case, we're going to give it a count, right? You can do a boxed breath is the same count on all four sides, and by that I mean inhale for four, hold for for, exhale for 4 and hold 4. That's a Boxed Breath, okay?

Can change the count. You can inhale for four, hold for two, and exhale for six. But I wouldn't go for anything longer than an eight count in any direction.

So just breathing. Give yourself some of that. And the last P is progressive muscle relaxation, where you're just clenching and unclenched all the pairs of your muscles.

So right now I'm pointing my toes, now, I am flexing them towards the ceiling. Now, clench my calves and clenshing my quads and hamstrings and unclenching all of the way up to my eyebrows.

Okay, my shoulders, hands, everything. This is a way to get some of that energy out. It's another way, another discharge of energy. That's great. We'll put a reference to that also because there's just so much, so many nuggets of gold in our conversation.

Now, I can say that we could like chat for a very, very long time, but let me just ask you one more question for right now and related to your work, which is I know that you work with couples and sometimes men who are in the middle of a divorce.

Is that correct? They referred to you, mediators, attorneys, etc. What do you find that men think about, that they realize that, they didn't understand about relationships?

I want to come at this in a couple ways. I'm sort of getting the man's perspective from you as well as your professional work. Sure, I am going to share a story and then we can pull it out if you don't want it.

The grandmother of Barack Obama died just a few months before he was elected the first time and he visited her and she said something to the effect of, you're kind of the same person, but your body gets older.

And she was just referring to it, the aging process and the life process. What I think happens for men as we grow into our bodies is And this was a response to your question.

What Men Learn About Relationships

I think something that men become aware of about their relationship is they were not fully aware. Of the impact they had on their partner. By that, I mean an angry response for them might be something where they yell and they're over it, but that's not the experience of the other person.

So a lot of people don't realize, and I've heard men say, I'm this kid who grew into this six foot two body. And my actions have consequences that I am not fully aware of and that wasn't aware.

Of and just because I handle my emotional state in a certain way and my relationship to stressors of life in certain ways. I think I made assumptions about how my partner would do that.

And by not paying more attention to where they really were, we grew further and further apart. Wow, that's incredible. Absolutely. That's like touching my heart.

Can I share one more thing? Sure, please. This is a piece of research from the 90s. If you make me dig it up, I will. I don't remember where it is, but I have it somewhere.

A long time ago. It's okay. Right. Good. to see if men or women are more effective assessors of the status of a relationship. And in this study, however they framed it, they determined that women were more accurate assessor of So the men might be like, I don't know why we're in couple steps.

Or I thought things were fine. And then she asked for a divorce. My joke about their observations in the study is the findings are that men are clueless.

or worse. I know oh my god okay I do need you to try to dig that up because we can do a whole other episode just that conversation because when you're starting to describe it I thought well it's gonna be women it can't be anything other than that and then so anyhow Go ahead.

Sorry. Right. And so, you know, I'll find. I do think I have a copy of this study somewhere in a box that's not too far away. So I will try to find it.

All right. We get from us. You know. so so we come back to this. What they realized was their awareness was not meeting the needs of the other person and the awareness of other persons.

and that led to things going further and further apart. What's beautiful is that they had the realization and that you can work with people to help them have that realization.

And hopefully people can listen to this discussion that we're having, this conversation that, we've had to be able to

use tools and be better assessors of what's going on.

So that's amazing. If people want to know more about your practice or working with you, how can they reach you? I'm gonna share that, but I wanna share one more thing.

I want to leave you with this paraphrase from a book called Attached, and it's about adult attachment styles by Amir Levine and Rachel Heller. And they talked about your main relationship is your royalty, your king and queen, or king of king, queen and Queen, whatever it is.

whatever it is. You two are your power couple and you're there for each other and there's not one above the other. It is two people there with love and support and commitment to each and that's you have that goal in mind above kind of whatever's going on in the moment to help drive how you are going to speak and how are you going take care of each through that moment.

So I wanted to share that. I love that that's beautiful. That's a whole nother conversation as well. Well, I picture that as a horizontal, like an infinity sign where the dynamic and energy is going back and forth instead of a hierarchy.

So that how I pictured that, so that was really remarkable. Yeah. OK, if you want to know more, how do they reach you? What's the best? Absolutely. Best way to reach me is my work cell phone.

310-745-7712. Please call me and leave a voicemail or text me there. And then my website, if you want to learn more about me. We'll put this all into the show notes on the website.

The website is just paulgcounseling.com. That's where to find me, but reach out to me by phone. Okay, fantastic. And the last question I have for you, I ask all of my guests, what is something that you personally do to connect with and experience your own hotness?

That's a great question. Hotness, like a good thing? Like aliveness, vitality, desire, across all walks of life.

Attachment, Hotness, and Closing Thoughts

It's not necessarily sexual, it's in life in general. These days, there's some psychology books that I keep rereading and going back to. And so I'm just trying to think about before, it's like in Aladdin time, forgot.

I just try to go back before I got all the messages about how I am supposed to be in the world to just take in what's around me. and take it in and when I don't feel grateful, I like to intellectually say I have gratitude for, and that gets me there.

So it is about gratitude, but sometimes I am not grateful. I can just say, well, take the beat about what I have gratitude for, and thinking about how I'd like that to be in the world, but realizing that's an outcome, whatever my vision is, now I gotta think about, what am I gonna do for that?

So it's about just trying to- Okay, so what is something that you do to embody that. I got the part where you think it, then how do you That is a great question.

It's almost like I have to… One step that you take that gets you into your body? It is, again, it's just I take a breath and I just try to make sure that I'm not looking at myself, I am not being self-conscious, and trying to direct whatever that self conscious energy is outward.

So, looking out into the world and taking you to the worlds. All right, very good. And I'm going to ask you one more little piece because I really want to get to a little more, like not an answer from you from here.

So I totally get that. It's beautiful. You breathe, you pause, You look out into the world and then how does that make you feel? What comes from that on a fairly regular basis, it feel energized.

Nice, beautiful, thank you. feel more alive with that. Thank you so much. thank you for this conversation. I look forward to further conversations. i know we'll see each other soon but also maybe another one of these episodes because i always welcome questions and comments and based on people's feedback what else we can talk about and share i Absolutely.

This is great. And this has made me think of a whole bunch of other stuff that I'd love to share. So anytime. Fantastic. We'll plan on that. Thanks for listening to Hotness.

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